

**MINUTES OF
FAIRFAX COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 2001**

PRESENT: Walter L. Alcorn, Commissioner At-Large
John R. Byers, Mount Vernon District
Joan M. DuBois, Dranesville District
Janet R. Hall, Mason District
Suzanne F. Harsel, Braddock District
John B. Kelso, Lee District
Ronald W. Koch, Sully District
Ilryong Moon, Commissioner At Large
Peter F. Murphy, Jr., Springfield District
John M. Palatiello, Hunter Mill District
Linda Q. Smyth, Providence District
Laurie Frost Wilson, Commissioner At-Large

ABSENT: None

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The meeting was called to order at 8:15 p.m. by Chairman Peter F. Murphy, Jr.

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COMMISSION MATTERS

Commissioner Murphy announced his intent to defer the decision only on SE-00-S-038, Jagdish Berry, from May 10, 2001 to an indefinite date.

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ORDER OF THE AGENDA

Chairman Murphy noted that there was only one item on tonight's agenda.

1. S98-CW-2CP -OUT-OF-TURN PLAN AMENDMENT
(Merrifield Suburban Center Study)

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S98-CW-2CP - OUT-OF-TURN PLAN AMENDMENT (Merrifield Suburban Center Area) - To consider proposed revisions to the Adopted Comprehensive Plan in accordance w/the Code of Virginia, Title 15.2, Chap. 22 concerning approx. 1360 ac. & is comprised of the Merrifield

Suburban Center & additional property proposed for inclusion in the Merrifield Suburban Center which include: the commercial properties on the N. side of Old Lee Hwy. & on both the N. & S. sides of Rt. 29 between Cedar La. & Prosperity Ave.; the former E-Systems property (Tax Map 49-4((1))59A, 59B, & 59C); & the Fairfax Inova Hospital & other health & human service facilities N. of Woodburn Rd., as well as the Bedford Village Apts. The subject area is generally located S. of I-66, E. of Prosperity Ave. & Cedar La., W. of Jaguar Trail & N. of Woodburn Rd. The current Comprehensive Plan designates most of this area as a suburban center w/a transit station & is generally planned for a mix of land uses including office, industrial, retail, & residential. The Plan Amendment considers changes to the Comprehensive Plan that would focus development in two core areas: the Town Center Area & the Transit Station Area. The proposed amendment recommends the highest intensity in the core areas & provides guidance for urban design, i.e., pedestrian & open space system, streetscape design, building/site design & building heights. The proposed Amendment also provides additional guidance for parcel consolidation, interparcel access, the provision of affordable housing & an expanded grid system to provide for better internal circulation. PROVIDENCE DISTRICT. PUBLIC HEARING.

Ms. Charlene Fuhrman-Schulz, Planning Division (PD), Department of Planning and Zoning (DPZ), presented the staff report, a copy of which is in the date file. She noted that the combined staff and Citizen's Task Force recommendations outlined on pages 17 through 138 included introductory material as well as general concepts and guidance for land use, urban design, transportation and public facilities.

Mr. Robert Mortensen, Chairman of the Citizen's Task Force appointed by the Board of Supervisors to study the Merrifield area, discussed the focus and goals of the Task Force. He outlined the Task Force membership and listed the County agencies that provided staff support.

Chairman Murphy recited the rules for public testimony and called the first listed speaker.

Mr. Jack Wilburn, 6631-A Old Dominion Drive, McLean, Dranesville District representative on the Revitalization Policy Committee, spoke about the need to strengthen and clarify community reinvestments, both social and financial, in revitalization areas. He supported the proposed recommendations, which he said were both clear and flexible.

Mr. John Lynch, 4333 Upland Drive, Alexandria, representing the Southeast Fairfax Development Corporation, one of the seven revitalization groups in Fairfax County, supported the proposed Plan Amendment, particularly the urban design recommendations and attention to transportation needs.

Mr. Albert McAloon, 7416 Highland Street, Springfield, representing the Central Springfield Area Revitalization Committee, also supported the Plan Amendment. He said it was a well thought-out plan and a good example of revitalization.

Mr. Jonathan Westreich, 604 Cameron Street, Alexandria, highlighted the points outlined in his letter to the Commission, a copy of which is in the date file. He generally supported the proposed amendments with the exception of the addition of Option 2 in Land Bay A for a possible ball park.

Mr. Westreich responded to questions from Commissioners Byers, Alcorn and Hall regarding his perception of the difference between urban and suburban densities.

Ms. Denise Rodgers, 8627 Dellway Lane, Vienna, was opposed to the increased densities and building heights. She also expressed opposition to the option for a ball park and said that road improvements were needed in the area now, not in the future.

Ms. Rebecca Cate, 8119 Westchester Drive, Vienna, objected to Option 2 in Land Bay A as well as the proposed increases in density and building heights. She was concerned about the traffic impact of the proposals and said she could not support the overall plan. (A joint letter from Ms. Cate and Mr. Cavin [next speaker] is in the date file.)

Ms. Cate and Mr. Sterling Wheeler, PD, DPZ, responded to questions from Commissioners Alcorn and Smyth regarding traffic statistics and building heights.

Mr. Michael Cavin, 8119 Westchester Drive, Vienna, said that more parking spaces for commuters were needed and that while Option 2 for Land Bay A suggested increased parking, there was no provision that such parking be restricted to commuters. He therefore was opposed to Option 2 and very concerned about the increased intensity in general. (A joint letter from Mr. Cavin and Ms. Cate [previous speaker] is in the date file.)

Mr. Wheeler responded to questions from Commissioners Alcorn and Smyth regarding floor area ratios (FARs) and open space, respectively.

Mr. Anthony Socci, 2700 Belleforest Court, #410, Vienna, representing the Westbriar HOA, expressed his opposition to Option 2 for Land Bay A. He said that mixed uses should be encouraged, but not at urban densities. He said that Fairfax County's existing firefighting capacity was generally limited to 110 feet and maintained that buildings higher than that would create problems in the event of a fire.

In response to a question from Commissioner Smyth, Mr. Socci said that he obtained the information about the Fire Department from a number of people. He said he had been told that Fairfax County had only one vehicle capable of handling fires in buildings higher than 110 feet.

Commissioner Smyth pointed out that there were many buildings in Fairfax County higher than 110 feet. Mr. Socci acknowledged that, but maintained that higher buildings were still a risk and the Commission should consider that fact in making a decision on these proposed changes.

Mr. Socci continued his testimony, reiterating his opposition to any type of entertainment use as suggested in Option 2 for Land Bay A. (A copy of a letter from Mr. Socci and a petition from the citizens in Westbriar are in the date file.)

Commissioner Smyth commented that she and Supervisor Connolly also had concerns about a possible ball park.

Mr. Tom Christensen, 3609 Prosperity Avenue, Fairfax, representing the Pine Ridge Civic Association, supported the urban concept outlined in the proposed Plan Amendment, but said it was important that streetscaping and other suggested amenities not be waived during the rezoning and redevelopment process. He added this was an opportunity to ameliorate the currently unacceptable traffic situation in the area. He suggested that the following planning objective be added to those listed on pages 20 through 22 of the staff report: "Encourage a land use pattern that maintains, protects and enhances the stability of established residential neighborhoods and discourages additional traffic through such neighborhoods by phased development of adequate transportation improvements, including primary highways and increased reliance on non-SOV [single occupancy vehicles] modes of transportation such as light rail and other mass transit means."

Mr. Paul Snodgrass, 8221 Stonewall Drive, Vienna, representing the Stonewall Manor Community Association, expressed opposition to Option 2 for Land Unit A. He suggested that consideration be given to the possibility of constructing a parking plaza above I-66 such as the existing one above I-66 in Arlington near the Arlington Board of Education. (A copy of Mr. Snodgrass' statement is in the date file.)

Mr. Richard Hildreth, 8300 Stonewall Drive, Vienna, supported the overall concepts, but was opposed to Option 2 for Land Bay A and to any plan to reduce parking at the Metro station. (A copy of Mr. Hildreth's testimony is in the date file.)

Ms. Barbara Hildreth, 8300 Stonewall Drive, Vienna, noted that she had participated in the PLUS program in 1975 when Merrifield was divided into three areas: the Dunn Loring Metro complex; Merrifield industrial; and the Chiles tract. She said that this grouping had resulted in outstanding development in Merrifield, but that it was now time to revise the plans to enhance the transportation network, both vehicular and pedestrian. (A copy of Ms. Hildreth's statement is in the date file.)

Mr. Ted Kniker, 2807 Laura Gae Circle, Vienna, representing the Providence Park HOA, explained that Mr. Emory Tate, the next listed speaker, had been called out of town due to

a death in the family and that he would speak on Mr. Tate's behalf. Mr. Kniker spoke about the current traffic situation in Merrifield. He supported the proposals for at-grade improvements on Gallows Road, but was concerned about the impact of increased urban-type densities on schools and other facilities in the area. He concurred with Mr. Socci's remarks that high rise buildings outstripped Fairfax County's fire fighting ability since the Fire Department was largely structured to handle situations in suburban settings and suggested that building heights be reduced. He also expressed his opposition to Option 2 for Land Unit A.

Mr. Kniker responded to questions from Commissioner Byers regarding his opinion of the difference between urban and suburban densities.

Mr. Wheeler responded to questions from Commissioner Smyth about the existing and projected student population. He noted that there were tables on page 13 of the staff report depicting those statistics.

In response to questions from Commissioner Alcorn, Mr. Kniker elaborated on his opposition to Option 2, explaining that he could support a density of 1.5 FAR on that portion of Land Bay A close to the Metro station, which represented a .5 increase over the density proposed in Option 1.

Mr. Timothy Reed, 8205 Bucknell Drive, Vienna, complimented the Task Force and staff for their work on this much-needed Plan Amendment. He spoke about the statistics relied upon in many instances, especially questioning the low figures shown on page 158 regarding school enrollment. Mr. Reed said that, ironically, if he were doing the calculations himself, he would probably use the same statistics, but he would add an asterisk, and the notation at the bottom of the page next to the asterisk would read: "Do you feel lucky?" He suggested that high rise densities should be conditioned in some manner that would allow flexibility in the event the actual impacts were found to be significantly out of proportion to the projections. Mr. Reed further questioned the assumptions inherent in the bar charts on page 151 depicting traffic impacts at both AM and PM peak hours.

Mr. Reed responded to questions from Commissioner Alcorn regarding the charts and figures in the staff report and the assumptions upon which they were based.

Ms. Sally Ormsby, 9114 Coronado Terrace, Fairfax, representing the Citizens Committee on Land Use & Transportation, supported the proposed Plan Amendment if it was implemented in an orderly, coordinated way. She reported the Committee's comments on the following subjects: core areas, industrial uses, urban design, overlay district, transportation, streetscapes, pedestrian network, public facilities, environment, parks and open space, and establishment of a business improvement district. (A copy of these comments is in the date file.)

Mr. John Eltzroth, 2862 Hartland Road, Falls Church, representing the Greater Merrifield Business Association, supported the proposed Plan Amendment. He said the only reservation

Association members had was the lack of full participation by representatives of the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT).

Mr. Tom Hyland, 5207 Braywood Drive, Centreville, supported Option 2 for Land Bay A. He said that a ball park would be a family-oriented use that would encourage good economic development. He maintained that the proximity of Metro and the use of car pools would reduce the traffic impact generated by ball park patrons.

Mr. William Lecos, 1129 20th Street, NW, Washington, DC, representing The Greater Washington Board of Trade, supported Option 2 for Land Bay A. He said that it was important to plan growth that would promote and preserve the character of the region's high quality of life. He explained that the Board of Trade's policy position on managing growth was guided by the goal of maintaining the Greater Washington area as the world's best place to invest, work, live, play and learn. He said that including an entertainment and/or recreational use in Option 2, possibly a ball park for the Prince William Cannons Baseball Team, would further that goal.

Mr. Roger Diedrich, 3322 Prince William Drive, Fairfax, representing the Sierra Club, commended the Task Force and staff for their admirable work in putting forth a generally sound land use plan for the Merrifield Suburban Center. He noted, however, that one area lacking was the provision of open space sufficient to serve the additional housing units proposed. He added that it was important to support mass transit, thereby reducing the need for more highway lanes. (A copy of Mr. Diedrich's statement is in the date file.)

Mr. Tom Barksdale, representing the Fairfax Coalition for Smarter Growth, P. O. Box 2784, Fairfax, said that while the proposed Plan Amendment included many worthwhile features, the Coalition opposed adoption in its current form. He spoke about his impression that the Task Force and VDOT were not operating under the same parameters. As an example of this, he pointed out that the Task Force recommended streetscaping and a pedestrian-friendly street network while VDOT planned an intersection at Gallows Road and Lee Highway that no sane person would cross on foot without an armed guard. Mr. Barksdale added the Coalition was disappointed that more citizen input was not solicited. He said that only three Town Meetings were held during the three-year planning process and that two of those meetings took place during the Christmas/New Year holiday season when even the most dedicated citizens found it difficult to focus on revitalization issues. He pointed out that the Coalition had prepared an alternative to the current public participation process entitled "Collaborative Citizen Planning." He said it was included in the package distributed tonight and urged its consideration. (Copies of Mr. Barksdale's testimony and supporting documents are in the date file.)

Chairman Murphy disagreed that opportunities for public participation were insufficient. He noted that those involved in the process had done their best to publicize the meetings, even to the extent of establishing a web page.

In response to questions from Commissioner Smyth, Mr. Robert Mortensen, Chairman of the Task Force, explained that approximately one year ago he had been approached by a representative of the Fairfax Coalition for Smarter Growth and given documents outlining its position. He added that the Coalition had been invited to make a presentation at a Task Force meeting but the representative had declined and requested that Mr. Mortensen distribute the Coalition's documents to the Task Force himself, which he did. Mr. Mortensen said he had not heard further from anyone from the Coalition until the process was almost completed, at which point the Coalition was once again invited to make a presentation and did so at the last or next to last Task Force meeting. On the matter of a light rail option, Mr. Mortensen stated that the Task Force had discussed the issue, but felt it was impossible to incorporate specifics in the recommendations because there were too many variables and unanswered questions since rail would obviously not be confined to Merrifield, but would have to be part of an extensive system. He added the Task Force certainly did not object to rail. Mr. Wheeler pointed out that provision of additional rail service was mentioned in the last paragraph on page 64 of the staff report.

Regarding the public outreach issue, Commissioner Smyth noted that Supervisor Connolly's office distributed newsletters on a regular basis to all the citizens in Providence District which included information about Task Force meetings and with progress reports as well as a phone number for citizens to call if further information was desired. She added that the Task Force and staff made presentations to the Providence District Council, the Greater Merrifield Business Association, and various other citizens groups and that there were newspaper articles on the subject of the Merrifield replanning process.

Mr. Flint Webb, 8308 Westchester Drive, Vienna, said that the concepts outlined in the proposed Plan Amendment were good, but he objected to Option 2 and the high densities for Land Bay A. He supported mass transit and suggested that more parking was needed at the Metro Station and that more input from Metro riders should be sought. He felt that the statistics used for existing traffic and student enrollment were understated and wondered why this proposal was coming through the Out-of-Turn Plan Amendment process rather than being evaluated as part of the normal Area Plans Review (APR) cycle.

Commissioner Smyth explained that Merrifield had been designated a special study area and that special studies took more time than that allowed for nominations in the APR process.

Mr. Ray Worley, representing the Dunn Loring Improvement Association, P. O. Box 115, Dunn Loring, and a member of the Task Force, congratulated staff for their efforts in production of the staff report. He pointed out, however, that while the report spoke of a consensus, he in fact did not agree with many of the Task Force recommendations. Mr. Worley outlined his objections and questions, specifically the assumptions supporting the substance of the recommendations regarding Metro ridership, traffic generation, the effectiveness of transportation demand management, and student enrollment. He suggested that a decision on this proposed Plan

Amendment be delayed until more detailed research on Metro ridership was completed and the proposal completely reevaluated, rewritten and subject to further citizen review. (A copy of Mr. Worley's statement is in the date file.)

When the next listed speaker, Mr. Stewart Schwartz, representing the Coalition for Smarter Growth, 1777 Church Street NW, Washington, DC, was called, Mr. Roger Diedrich, a previous speaker, approached the podium and explained that Mr. Schwartz was unable to be present and that he would read a statement in Mr. Schwartz's absence.

In response to a question from Commissioner Hall, Mr. Diedrich explained that the Coalition for Smarter Growth (CSG) was not affiliated with the Fairfax Coalition for Smarter Growth. Chairman Murphy asked if Mr. Diedrich could supply the Commission with an information sheet or something similar about the organization. Mr. Diedrich replied that he represented the Sierra Club, which was a member of the umbrella group CSG, but that he would pass the request along to Mr. Schwartz.

Mr. Diedrich then read Mr. Schwartz's statement which commended the emphasis on pedestrian friendly designs and mixed uses, but offered several suggestions for improvements, such as focusing more density closer to the Metro station with reduced setbacks that would bring buildings closer together and create more open spaces. (A copy of Mr. Schwartz's statement is in the date file.)

Mr. Joshua Icore, 2769 Manhattan Place, Vienna, explained that he was a new resident of Merrifield. He suggested that this proposed plan, like many plans, might not survive an encounter with reality. He concurred with previous speakers who questioned the underlying assumptions regarding traffic generation and expressed his opposition to Option 2 for Land Bay A.

In response to questions from Commissioner Alcorn, Mr. Icore voiced his support for mass transit in general and the Dunn Loring Metro Station in particular. He said that there needed to be sufficient parking for commuters and that the road network should be designed to facilitate commuter access.

Mr. Steve DelBianco, 9123 Horner Court, Fairfax, representing the Mantua Citizens Association, said that the Association had a list of comments and concerns, but that he would highlight only one; that being the need to remember that increasing the density of parcels that would ultimately be needed for road improvements would make VDOT's acquisition of those parcels more expensive, thereby increasing the cost to taxpayers. Mr. DelBianco applauded the work of the Task Force and commented that he found the entire process to be open and information about its progress easily obtained. (A copy of the Association's list in the date file.)

Mr. Joseph Annunziata, 3132 Wynford Drive, Fairfax, member of the Task Force, supported the Plan Amendment, especially the mixed use recommendations for the core areas with a full range of amenities which he said would create a sense of community for Merrifield. He was opposed to a grade separated interchange at Gallows Road and Lee Highway and supported an extension of rail or perhaps express bus service to broaden mass transit options in the area.

Mr. George Lampman, 8531 Aponi Road, Vienna, spoke in opposition to the proposed changes. He said there was no reason to "revamp" Merrifield and saw no need for increased density and more development. He suggested instead that current businesses be encouraged to upgrade their properties. Mr. Lampman also opposed Option 2 for Land Bay A.

Mr. Clark Gray, 8325 Electric Avenue, Vienna, explained that he was a Little League Baseball coach and spoke in support of Option 2. He said that an entertainment and/or recreational use would create jobs and provide green space.

In response to questions from Commissioner Kelso, Mr. Wheeler explained that Option 2 suggested a mix of uses, some of which would be at a 2.45 FAR level, and could include an entertainment and/or recreational use.

Mr. Jay Hirschman, 8603 Dellway Lane, Vienna, commented that the traffic statistics in the staff report seemed to represent a peak concept rather than the number of days that traffic was likely to exceed the point at which traffic hazards and safety risks would occur and suggested that further analysis was needed of the traffic impact. He expressed his concern about what a baseball stadium would be used for when baseball games were not scheduled and what would happen if rush hour, which seemed to be extending every day, coincided with incoming traffic for stadium events. He also questioned whether adequate consideration had been given to how conflicts between pedestrian and vehicular traffic at the intersection of Lee Highway and Gallows Road could be addressed.

Commissioner Smyth noted, and Mr. Wheeler confirmed, that the Task Force had concentrated on pedestrian traffic within walking distance of the Metro station and that did not extend to the Lee Highway/Gallows Road intersection.

Mr. Wheeler responded to questions from Commissioner Harsel regarding what constituted a reasonable walking distance.

Ms. Joanna Pillis, 3000 Fallswood Court, Arlington, explained that she was an employee of Dewberry and Davis and had been a resident of Fairfax County, in both Providence and Mason Districts, for more than 27 years, although she currently resided in Arlington, near a Metro station. She supported Option 2 for Land Bay A as well as the proposals for mixed uses and increased densities around the Metro station. She pointed out that economic forces would be

a large factor in determining the implementation of the proposed plans and that development of a ball park would help attract the investment interests needed to carry out the desired plans.

Mr. Art Silber, Owner, Potomac Cannons Baseball Team, P. O. Box 2148, Woodbridge, presented his justification for a ball park on Land Bay A. He explained that the park would be a family-oriented facility that could be built at no expense to taxpayers. He added that a community board could be established so that residents in the area could be involved in stadium operations and event planning.

Chairman Murphy commented that he had attended many games at the Cannons' present facility in Prince William County. He commended Mr. Silber on the level of professionalism displayed in the operation of that stadium.

Mr. Silber thanked Chairman Murphy for his kind remarks and noted that he and his consultants had been searching for an adequate location in Fairfax County for more than two years and Land Bay A of this proposed Plan Amendment area was the only site that appeared to have the ingredients needed for a successful operation, including proximity to mass transit and affordable land value.

Mr. J. Paul Lewis, with Dewberry & Davis, 8401 Arlington Boulevard, Fairfax, presented a slide show of a conceptual plan for a ball park on Land Bay A, depicting how it could fit into the various mixed use components proposed.

Mr. Lewis responded to questions from Commissioners Wilson, Hall, and Harsel regarding his presentation.

Tim Sampson, Esquire, with Walsh, Colucci, Stackhouse, Emrich and Lubeley, 2200 Clarendon Boulevard, 13th floor, Arlington, encouraged the adoption of Option 2 for Land Bay A. He said that a ball park would help make Merrifield, in the terms of an earlier speaker, Mr. Lecos, who represented The Greater Washington Board of Trade, a good place "to invest, work, live, play and learn."

In response to questions from Commissioner Palatiello, Mr. Silber maintained that approval of this Plan Amendment with Option 2 for Land Bay A would not in any way preclude or inhibit Fairfax County's ability to attract a major league baseball team. He added that there were many communities in the United States where minor and major league teams co-existed; for example, Chicago had two minor league teams within 10 or 15 miles of the White Sox and the Cubs.

Mr. Ray Sumser, 2441 Villanova Drive, Vienna, spoke in opposition to a ball park. He said the traffic and noise impacts would be too great. He was also opposed to higher, urban-style densities in Merrifield.

There were no further speakers and staff had no closing comments.

Commissioner Hall pointed out that this proposed Plan Amendment was intended to provide guidance for land use development and that any specific proposals for zoning changes would be subject to the normal public hearing process at which time many of the details of the issues raised this evening could be further addressed.

Commissioner Smyth thanked every one who attended tonight's meeting, both those who presented testimony and those who did not. She also thanked the Task Force members and staff for their efforts.

There being no further comments or questions from the Commission, Chairman Murphy closed the public hearing and recognized Commissioner Smyth for action on this case. (Verbatim excerpts are in the date file.)

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Commissioner Smyth MOVED TO DEFER DECISION (ON S98-CW-2CP) UNTIL TWO WEEKS FROM TODAY, MAY 23, 2001.

Commissioners Alcorn and Byers seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

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The meeting was adjourned at 12:01 a.m.
Peter F. Murphy, Jr., Chairman
Suzanne F. Harsel, Secretary

For a verbatim record of this meeting, reference may be made to the audio and video recordings which may be found in the Office of the Planning Commission of Fairfax County, Virginia.

Minutes by: Gloria L. Watkins

Approved on: July 25, 2002

Mary A. Pascoe, Clerk to the
Fairfax County Planning Commission